

Tanz mit Laibach

It took Slovenian provocateurs to give the Ultima Festival a touch of something dangerous. And danceable.

Journalist: Mode Steinkjer

CONCERT

Laibach

Sentrum Scene

Ultimafestivalen

Review:

One wonders if the Ultima Festival got what they expected from Laibach's concert. The Slovenian avant-gardists Laibach suddenly made this year's festival dangerous and danceable in equal measures.

Since the 1980s that art-rock formation has explored the hidden militant and industrial aesthetics of pop music. In public, they never leave their self-imposed and controversial role including use of uniforms and ideological characteristics, and even their very name has not made them less ambiguous. Laibach was the name the Nazi occupiers used for Slovenia's capital Ljubljana.

In their Ultima concert, they tore up the image of Olav Tryggvason. Which is to say, they immersed themselves in Norse mythology and the Kings of old, and the neo-classicist musical picture they created of the King-Christener who fell at the Battle of Svolder is devoid of a hero's halo. Instead, Laibach constructs Edvard Grieg's unfinished opera in the same tradition as they have earlier cleansed pop music of everything but its suggestive, totalitarian elements. Grieg's Opus 50 undeniably takes on another quality when Laibach in a tight, experimenting style sing about Heimdall and Mjólnir while waves crash through the back-projected video installations and the chorus «Hear us, hear us» echoes.

This is Snorri's depiction of the King-Mutilator, and when Norway's national anthem is added with a foreboding bass voice and a hissing musical arrangement, discomfort is vibrating through the venue. Textual and musical content is always open to interpretation. Laibach mercilessly points this out through their musical and artistic balance act with Norwegian national romanticism, Grieg and Bjornson as their slack line.

The «regular» part of the concert was a manifestation of the political Laibach and their electronic music, cultivated in accordance with the arts collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). In addition to socially conscious records like «Kapital» and «NATO», the band is mostly known for industrial, partly grotesquely overblown cover versions of mainstream pop and rock songs, such as Opus' «Life is life», Rolling Stones' «Sympathy for the Devil» and the whole Beatles' «Let it be» album.

In later years, they have created conceptual interpretations of classical music at, among others, Tate Modern in London and composed the fantastic electropop tune «Under the Iron Sky» as part of their own sound track to the science fiction comedy «Iron Sky».

At Sentrum Scene, the cover version highlight became Bob Dylan's «Ballad of a Thin Man», although most of the concert was built around this year's «Spectre» album, with the Edward

Snowden homage «The Whistleblower» was the audience's exit march.

Before that, among others «Resistance is Futile» and «No History», which celebrate modern political counter-culture like the Occupy Wall Street – movement, a perfect depiction of Laibach's ability to comment on our times with stereotypes about Eastern Europe as their starting point.

And Laibach have never sounded softer and more hopeful than on the song «Koran», where now regular (?) member and co-vocalist Mina Spiler sings «I believe in a better world/I believe in brotherhood, equality and freedom/I believe in happiness for all» together with front man Milan Fras. The band are tightly in tune with each other, playing part electronically, part analog, with Kraftwerk influence glowing darkly in the background and spontaneous robot voices that show life behind the stone faces. With the expressive industrial techno number «Eat Liver», Mina Spiler awakes to life an almost aggressive unrest in the sitting Sentrum Scene audience that is bound to escalate at some point. That happens when «Tanz Mit Laibach» explodes with unregimented spontaneous dance between chairs, in the aisles and on stage by audience who manage to storm it. At one point Milan Fras even smiled, and a better sign of a perfect Laibach concert does not exist. Laibach were like a polished, earth-shaking ideological freight train who with humour as a disarming stimulant was running through the audience, from the hardcore totalitarian to nuanced songs resting like beautiful spires on a black, dark and foreboding construction of danceable discomfort.